

Driving after stroke



What you need to know

- › Driving is a complex task. You need good vision, movement and thinking. Stroke can affect these abilities.
- › You must not drive a private vehicle for **at least four weeks** after a stroke. Commercial licence holders must not drive for **at least three months**.
- › You must tell the driver licensing authority in your state that you have had a stroke.
- › After a stroke, your health professionals assess your ability to drive. They provide reports for the state licensing authority.
- › State licensing authorities make decisions about your driver's licence. You may have an unrestricted licence. You may have conditions placed on your licence. Your licence may be suspended or cancelled.
- › Not being able to drive can make life hard. It's common to experience grief and loss. There are things that can help. Read the Get Help section at the end of this fact sheet.
- › You will need advice and support as you go through this process. It can be difficult to understand and navigate. Your health professionals, the licensing authorities and the team at StrokeLine can help. Read the Get Help section.

Stroke and driving

Driving is a complex task. You need **good vision, movement and thinking**. Stroke can affect these abilities.

To drive safely, you need to be able to:

- › See objects while you're driving. This includes other cars, pedestrians and warning signs.
- › Operate the car and respond quickly. This includes being able to move your head, steer, accelerate and brake.
- › Judge distance and speed.
- › Concentrate for the whole time you are driving.
- › Gather, interpret, remember and respond quickly to information.
- › Understand situations and make good decisions.
- › Understand written and spoken language.
- › Recognise how the effects of your stroke have changed your ability to drive.

After your stroke, you may experience seizures. Seizures make it unsafe for you to drive.

You can't drive straight away

You must not drive a private vehicle for **at least four weeks** after a stroke. Commercial drivers must not drive for **at least three months**.

This is because it takes time to assess the impact of stroke. The non-driving period applies to everyone after a stroke.

Four weeks for a private driver and three months for a commercial driver are just the minimum. Your non-driving period only ends when a doctor clears you to drive.

Tell the licensing authority you have had a stroke

Every driver must tell the state licensing authority about medical conditions that may affect their driving. This is a legal responsibility.

If you don't tell the licensing authority about your stroke, or you drive during your non-driving period or without medical clearance, you may face criminal charges after an accident. Your insurance will not cover you.

Assessing your ability to drive

After a stroke, your health professionals assess your ability to drive. They:

- › Check how your stroke has affected your vision, movement and thinking.
- › Assess the likely impact on your driving.
- › Provide reports for the licensing authority.

State licensing authorities make decisions about your driver's licence based on reports, assessments and tests.

The national Assessing Fitness to Drive standards are used by health professionals and licensing authorities to make decisions about driving and licensing. You can read the standards here:

austroads.com.au/drivers-and-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive

Impairments and driving

An impairment affects your ability to do something – in this case, driving.

If you have no significant impairments

The advice in this section is for private drivers who have a car class licence or a light rigid class licence. It does not apply to heavy vehicle license holders – these drivers should contact the licensing authority for advice.

If your stroke caused no significant impairments, your doctor can provide a report to the licensing authority to support your return to driving on an unconditional licence.

The licensing authority may accept a report from your GP. A medical specialist can also provide a report. This is usually a neurologist or rehabilitation physician.

If you have no significant impairments and you are discharged from hospital within four weeks of having a stroke, your treating doctor in hospital may provide a report supporting your return to driving on an unconditional licence. This means you will not have to have further assessment of your fitness to drive after discharge from hospital.

While this report may be provided at discharge, you will still not be able to drive until the end of your non-driving period, as stated by your doctor.

Although you may not have significant impairments due to your stroke, you may still have licence restrictions related to other medical conditions. Talk with your doctor if you are unsure.

If you have significant impairments

If your stroke has caused significant impairments, your rehabilitation team can talk to you about how your stroke has affected your ability to drive. If getting back to driving is important to you, let them know. Getting back to driving can be a rehabilitation goal.

Before you can start driving again, you will need an assessment of your ability to drive safely.

You may need to complete a driver rehabilitation program. You may need modifications to your vehicle.

This process is based on your impairments. It's different for different people. Your health professionals can answer your questions and tell you which assessments you need. Your doctors can help you arrange them.

If your stroke caused significant impairments, the licensing authority will usually require a report from a medical specialist such as a neurologist or rehabilitation physician. Contact the licensing authority for more information.

This process will require good communication between you, your doctors, and the licensing authority.

Assessments for driving

Vision assessment

If you have vision impairments, you will need a vision assessment. Ask your health professional what kind of assessments you need. You may need a binocular visual field assessment as well as a normal vision assessment. Your doctor can help you find an optometrist or ophthalmologist who can do the assessments you need.

Practical driving assessment

You may need a practical driving assessment. This is the same as the normal on-road driver's licence test.

Occupational therapy (OT) driving assessment

You may need an OT driving assessment. This focuses on impairments affecting driving.

An OT driving assessment has two parts:

- An 'off road' assessment to assess if you are ready to drive.
- An 'on road' assessment with the OT and a driving instructor.

You need to pay for an OT driving assessment. If you have private health insurance, ask if this cost is covered. If you are an NDIS participant, ask if you can include a driving assessment in your plan.

Once these assessments are done, your doctor will provide a report for the licensing authority. The report will state if:

- › You meet the standard to hold a driver's licence.
- › You need further assessment.
- › You need conditions placed on your licence.

The report form is available on the state licensing authority website.

Licensing authority decisions

The licensing authority may make a decision about your licence based on the report from your doctor.

They may also decide they need more information. If you haven't already completed a driving assessment, they may ask you to do so. This could be either a practical driving assessment or an OT driving assessment.

After your assessments and reports are complete, the licensing authority may decide:

- › You can start driving again on an unconditional licence.
- › You can start driving again on a conditional licence. Conditions can include how far from home you can drive, not driving at night and vehicle modifications.
- › You cannot start driving until you have successfully completed a driver rehabilitation program. These programs help build your skills, ability and confidence to drive.
- › You cannot drive and will have your licence suspended or cancelled.

If you disagree with a licensing authority decision, you can appeal. The appeal process is explained on the licensing authority website.

If your ability to drive improves, you can apply to get your licence back or have the conditions on your licence removed. Your health professionals can support this with new assessments and reports.

Update your insurance policy

If you do return to driving, ask your insurance company if you need to update your policy.

If you can't drive

Not being able to drive can limit what you can do. It can make it difficult to shop, get to appointments, visit friends and family and get back to work. It can make life hard and it is common to experience grief and loss. Talk with your health professional, and family and friends about how you are feeling.

Your health professional or the team at StrokeLine can help you plan different ways to get around and get things done. They can tell you about schemes and services that can help.

Get help

This is a complex process. It can be difficult to understand and navigate. You will need advice and support. Your health professionals, the licensing authorities and StrokeLine can help.



Get help

StrokeLine

StrokeLine's health professionals provide information, advice, support and referral. They can help you help you understand the return to driving process and what you need to do. If you can't drive, they can tell you about schemes and services that can help.

Open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
Australian Eastern Time (closed on national public holidays).

Call **1800 787 653**. Email strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au

Fitness to Drive Standards

austroads.com.au/drivers-and-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive

State licensing authorities

The licensing authority can help with more information.

Australian Capital Territory 13 22 81
accesscanberra.act.gov.au

New South Wales 13 22 13
nsw.gov.au/driving-boating-and-transport

Northern Territory 1300 654 628
nt.gov.au/driving

Queensland 13 23 80
tmr.qld.gov.au

South Australia 13 10 84
sa.gov.au

Tasmania 1300 135 513
transport.tas.gov.au

Victoria 13 11 71
vicroads.vic.gov.au

Western Australia 1300 852 722
transport.wa.gov.au




StrokeLine

StrokeLine's health professionals provide information and advice on stroke treatment, prevention and recovery.

They can help you find the support and services you need, whether you are a stroke survivor, carer or family member.

StrokeLine is a free service.

StrokeLine is available Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Eastern Standard Time (closed on Australian national public holidays).

 **1800 787 653**

 [**strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au**](mailto:strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au)



About us

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 STROKE (1800 787 653)**

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